41 Victoria Road, Kilburn, London
Sept. 16, 1872

My dear Dr Holmes,

The receipt of your marvellously yet characteristically kind reply to my letter will stand recorded in my memory as one of the bright events of my life. I had, as I think I told you, a hesitation in writing, and I should have shrunk back altogether if I had been able to imagine the untoward hour at which it would arrive. I can well understand the tangle in which you were, both heart and head involved. I do not feel <u>sure</u> that I quite understand the loss at which you point; but I am sure that it is some one whom you valued; and that is enough, like as the thought is, to make me wish that I

Oliver Wendell Holmes Esq^r M. D.

&c. &c. &c.

could do something to lighten your trouble. But of one thing I am certain — that sensitiveness to pain is but the correlative — the price of the power to feel the beauties and delights that are to be found in this life. For my own part, I disbelieve in death, and some years ~~ago~~ since wrote an article — unpublished — to prove how we must absolutely trust that instinct which tells us that life continues. But of a third thing I am also certain — that the man I am writing to perfectly understands the conditions on which we "humans" can earn the blessings offered to us even here on earth.

None the less a fact, that we have to face trouble, to mourn, and to work even under the darkest clouds; and I am the more sorry that the thought which I ventured to cast in your way came at a time when you were so perplexed. Yet I feel that no man would more thoroughly forgive my unconsciously ill-timed

arrival.

Your letter is clear, and I fully appreciate the difficulties; but I fall back on Lyndhurst's magnificent definition of a difficulty — "a thing to be overcome" And it will be overcome. When I was in America, it was explained to me that in the native tongue "a politician means a man who makes a trade of political life, and regards events solely as opportunities for acute commercial dealing, to the profit of self and party. We are well aware of a cognate species here, but our more mixed political life tends to correct it. It was hideous in the corrupt borough days which I well remember. But, as I said, the very first step towards correction is to disclose the malady; and so again, the very first step towards the awakening of a more <u>active</u> chivalric spirit among your Upper Ten would be to throw open a broad view of the field of enterprise on which the noble-hearted political Knight-errant

may enter, with all its dangers, all its monsters, all its difficulties in the most hideous forms of the repulsive and the ridiculous. Such a work attempted by a foreign hand would not only seem into error, but it would be an impertinence. Above all it should necessarily be done by the hand of affection, with thorough knowledge, and without the slightest thought of punishing, mortifying or degraded — merely and purely in a pathological sense. And, in the same strain of social physiology, to challenge the power of noble, self-sacrificing, loving patriotism, by recognising it, would as certainly call forth the healthy action. From your letter I seem to gather that I was longing only for the second, or Guardian Angel aspect of the subject; but I cannot give up my Elsie Venner.

I am perfectly with you in all that you say about the realism and the idealism

of the subject, about the Emerson and Winthrop schools; but the coarse masses have their volunteered foreman, the politician; and the non-literary yet cultivated upper ten must have their John Russells and Robert Peels, their Derbys and Gladstones. And if the English cousin visiting America, and watching it, can just take in the nature of the machine and follow its working, it is the native philosopher — the native intellectual physiologist alone, who thoroughly trace the life and reproduce it in fiction; and I also know that the man to do that most certainly can be found in America.

Forgive my brutal pertinacity in the face of the facts told me in your most valued letter. But the possibility of having such a book to read — may, I am not

thinking of it only in that selfish way —
the possibility of seeing such a book come forth,
to be read by the American people, is too
grand a temptation to be resisted. I do, therefore
in spite of your trouble, want to go on hoping,
and hence my pertinacity in seeking to make
you "think it over." Yet do not think that
I mean to become a literary dun dogging
your steps for an imaginary debt. But I
must thank you for your letter with all
the affectionate gratitude of a constant reader,
and my gratitude irresistably assumes, more than
ever, the shape of "a lively sense of future
favours".

Ever, my dear Dr Holmes
most sincerely yours
Thornton Hunt

P. S. I got your letter on the night
of the 6th, and meant to write by the

next Wednesday's post; but have been baulked by an alternation of business duties, and unusually feeble health, alternating at cross purposes with each other.